DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 044 CE 055 141

AUTHOR Bonfim, Maria Nubia Barbosa
TITLE The EDUCAR Foundation in Brazil: Two Experiences. Literacy Lessons.
INSTITUTION International Bureau of Education, Geneva (Switzerland).
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 17p.; For other "Literacy Lessons" booklets, see CE 055 128-167. Also available in French.
AVAILABLE FROM International Bureau of Education, P.O. Box 199, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland.
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; Adult Education; Basic Skills; *Community Education; Dropout Programs; Economic Factors; Elementary Secondary Education; Extension Education; Foreign Countries; *Illiteracy; *Industrialization; *Literacy Education; Rural Areas; Rural Urban Differences; *Socioeconomic Status
IDENTIFIERS *Brazil; Freire (Paulo); International Literacy Year 1990; *National Foundation Youth and Adult Educ (Brazil)

ABSTRACT

Data from a 1980 population census indicates that of the over 73.5 million people in Brazil who were over 15 years of age, 25.4 percent were illiterate and 27.42 percent had less than 1 year of schooling. Such data show the precarious situation of education in Brazil, particularly that of adolescents and adults. Its origins lie in the dual nature of the Brazilian economy, typified by considerable industrial development, ranking Brazil among the 10 major economies in the west, compared with a subsistence economy frequently encountered in urban slums and rural areas. This polarity has led to the concentration of income in the hands of the already affluent members of society and to a situation of absolute poverty, even misery, among the population excluded from the industrialization process. In 1985 the Brazilian government established the National Foundation for Youth and Adult Education (EDUCAR) to stimulate the development of literacy and basic education programs aimed at those who did not have access to school when they were young or who were prematurely excluded from it. It has promoted educational experiences of several kinds as long as they favored adult education as a process for achieving the rights of citizenship in a society moving toward democracy. An EDUCAR project in the Baixada Fluminese suburb begun in 1986 now provides 294 adult education classes in basic skills, social studies, and natural sciences. Another EDUCAR project, "Life as a School" in the city of Cabo, uses the methods of Paulo Freire and provides adults and adolescents with 6 months of literacy classes and 15 months of additional schooling. (CML)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED321044

LITERACY LESSONS

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

The EDUCAR Foundation in Brazil: two experiences

by Maria Núbia Barbosa Bonfim

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Adduz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CE055 141

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION

The political, socio-cultural and economic momentum of a country reflects its previous experience. An analysis of this process must be taken into account by all those intending to study such phenomena in a historical perspective. This is not simply to explain the facts, but rather in an effort to comprehend the significance of the past in the construction of the present. I would agree with Carr when he stated that history is permeated by an endless dialogue between the present and the past [1]. A rapid retrospective of the facts is thus necessary to carry out a study of educational experience, which is the object of this paper.

Directed by liberal attitudes, education has become widespread in Brazil, especially at the so-called elementary level, yet it has failed to reach several socio-economic layers of the population. Imbalances – typical of an economy which encourages income concentration such as ours, and generates deep social disparities as a natural consequences – added to the political reasons. During the country's historical struggles, alternate waves of democratic advances and authoritarian retreats, with oligarchies predominantly in command, have disturbed the development of national education.

This situation is also evident from the following data, taken from the 1980 census, which is the most recent. Compulsory education in Brazil, destined for children in the 7 to 14 year age bracket (totalling nearly 23 million children of school age), was followed by only 15.4 million or 67.1%; that is to say that about 7.5 million children did not enter the school system. In a population of over 73.5 million people over 15 years of age, 25.45% were illiterates and 27.42% had had less than one year of schooling.

Once interpreted, these data show that the precarious situation of education in the country, particularly concerning that of adolescents and adults, constitutes a major national issue. Its origins lie in the dualist nature of the Brazilian economy, typified by considerable industrial development, ranking Brazil among the ten major economies in the Western world, compared with a subsistence economy frequently encountered in urban slums and rural areas. This polarity has led, on the one hand, to the concentration of income in the hands of the already affluent members of society and, on the other, to a situation of absolute poverty, even misery, among the population excluded from the industrialization process.

> *'... Brazil will reach 1980 with that rate [of illiteracy] reduced to a percentile of 5% to 10%, similar therefore to that in the most developed nations.'*
>
> Ministry of Education and Culture, General Secretariat. *Plano Sectorial de Educaçao e Cultura 75–79.* MEC/SG, Brasilia, 1974, 1st part, Vol. I, p. 397.

In reality, the education system has been able to advance only timidly, notwithstanding the ambitious proposals by the government. In fact, on the eve of the year 2000 Brazil has not yet succeeded in universalizing basic education, and is struggling with serious problems which are inherent to the system, such as dropouts, failure and low quality of teaching. Basic education corresponds to primary instruction provided in the regular education system, with a duration of eight years. It is obvious, therefore, that the illiteracy devastating the Brazilian population is also perpetuated by the system's inertia, since thousands of children in the 7- to 14-year-old age bracket are never enrolled in school.

However, it was at the beginning of the 1960s that initiatives other than governmental ones emerged

more strongly. The government-sponsored Basic Education Movement (Movimento de Educaçao de Base – MEB) was created by Brazil's National Conference of Bishops, and grew into a movement of popular culture operating in the northern, northeastern and central-western regions of the country, where the strength of rural oligarchies was more evident.

In its original conception MEB 'intended to offer rural populations the opportunity of becoming literate in the context of basic education, as an effort to help promote the rural man and prepare him for basic indispensable changes, such as agrarian reform' [2].

In 1964, once again the country's democratic process went through a profound crisis, and activities in favour of the people wavered. MEB recoiled. There was a significant reduction in its programme and its very survival was threatened by huge difficulties, either for financial reasons leading to the collapse of its staff structure, or through lack of motivation brought about by changes in methodology – an expedient adopted in order to obtain financial support.

Yet it was in the 1960s that Professor Paulo Freire came forward with his ideas which would lead to considerable advances in adult education. The educational processes he presented aimed at the relationship between the individual and his or her environment; they took into consideration the cultural background of the individual who is studying to become literate; this is not done arbitrarily but through dialogue and communication. In this process education acquires a sense of wholeness, since the student is conceived from the standpoint of his/her own relationship with the world. In this way the content of education adopts the student's vocabulary and extracts from it 'generative words' used in the literacy process. Freire's proposal is thus devoid of political content, since the very essence of these words is already present in the learner's everyday life.

The ideas and experience of this great educator went beyond regional limits and spread throughout the country. The Ministry of Education also absorbed them. For example, in 1963 the National Plan of Education formally stated that its undertakings would be based on the methodology of the 'Paulo Freire System'.

The subsequent National Literacy Plan (NLP), adopted in January 1964, intended to reach a significant section of the illiterate population and thus awaken a national commitment to adult literacy, which had previously been absent from the national scene.

The NLP, however, barely took its first steps. The country was once again seized by conservative forces that suffocated democratic actions across the board. The 1964 authoritarian regime thus installed itself and the period that had just started to accept a liberating education gave way to conservatism, to intimidation and to silence.

The rapid changes occurring on the country's political stage resulted in a breakdown in efforts related to adult education. Nevertheless, it was during this period that Unesco reiterated its call for Member States, Brazil being one, to develop programmes to combat illiteracy.

The country needed to take steps to evolve a different attitude toward education. And it did. To replace the principles of a liberating education it adopted ideas originating from industrialized countries, which conceived adult education as a contribution to development. This new approach appeared to be in agreement with the ideas of functional literacy that began to guide adult education. To put this proposal into operation, the Brazilian Literacy Movement – MOBRAL – was created in 1967. In the beginning, the programme was very modest, only developing into a mass education programme in 1970, when it received significant financial backing.

It carried on its mass programme by operating as a structure with central control but decentralized action. This structure might appear to be innocuous. However, to decentralize action means to go beyond performing tasks. It presupposes the delegation of power and initiative. It means, in the final analysis, the political participation of the local agents involved in the process. But, in fact, this was not the case.

In subsequent years MOBRAL broadened its goals, encompassing programmes such as vocational training, community education for health, appropriate technology, pre-school education, community action and cultural activities, amongst others. This is when it started to decline: its aims exceeded its resources. Research has demonstrated that there was a significant reduction in clientele, combined with a considerable number of neo-literates falling into illiteracy. These factors, among others, contributed to discredit the organization in the eyes of municipal and state governments, and even among society in general, during the last years of its operation.

Little by little, the country once more began to advance along democratic paths. We reach 1985. The New Republic took over central power, defining itself as a regime of transition to democracy. By the end of that year the Brazilian Government established the National Foundation for Youth and Adult Education – EDUCAR – as MOBRAL's substitute. Its objectives were to stimulate the execution of literacy and basic education programmes aimed at those who did not have access to school when they were young or who were prematurely excluded from it.

This meant a substantive change. EDUCAR assumed the position of a multi-functional institution. It was clear that the principle of decentralization would be implemented through the participation of governmental and non-governmental institutions in the planning

and execution of its educational projects for adolescents and adults.

As a multi-facetted organization it promoted educational experiences of several kinds, either concerning their educational aspects or their philosophical foundations, as long as the commitment assumed by the participating institutions supported by the EDUCAR Foundation favoured adult education as a process for achieving the rights of citizenship in a society moving towards democracy.

The support offered to participating institutions has taken the form of financial and technical aid, followed by an evaluation system developed by EDUCAR in partnership with the institutions executing the programme, either governmental or non-governmental.

The participating institutions' autonomy in pursuing their own objectives was therefore not obstructed. Although EDUCAR has prepared its own Basic Education Programme (BEP), it is presented as an alternative that the participating institutions may or may not choose to follow. This programme is being developed on a large scale, since the participating institutions under contract with EDUCAR may not be able to furnish their own teaching materials.

BEP aims at offering adolescents and adults the possibility of mastering basic skills for their greater participation in a literate society, which means access to reading and writing in the Portuguese language, to the reading and writing of symbols and basic mathematical operations, to essential knowledge of the social and natural sciences, and other information necessary for an individual's participation as a social being, in view of the reality he/she lives in, contributing to the full exercise of citizenship.

EDUCAR Foundation's Basic Education Primer, Rio de Janeiro, 1986.

BASIC EDUCATION PROJECT FOR THE BAIXADA FLUMINENSE SUBURB

In the police columns of Brazilian newspapers, the Baixada Fluminense suburb of Rio de Janeiro is notorious because of its high crime rate. However, these press articles do not always refer to the living conditions of its 2.5 million population, who are subject to the worst of violences: the denial of their rights to citizenship. In fact, I would say that the Baixada Fluminense is very typical of many urban areas in the country. Slums grow up on the fringes of towns and cities, generally as a consequence of the migration of poverty-stricken people suffering from the same basic needs: difficult access to essential rights – work, housing, health and education, all favouring the proliferation of begging, disease and delinquency.

In contrast to the picture just described, and therefore particularly significant, Baixada Fluminense is one of the most striking examples of popular political organization, which has been going on actively since 1970. In addition to the Basic Ecclesiastic Communities (Comunidades Eclesiasis de Base – CEBs), other organizations have evolved, such as the Dwellers' Associations and the Club of Mothers, associated in various federations.

It should be stressed that these popular movements were initially set up to claim for rights (electricity, water, sanitation, education, housing, transportation) and, having thus evolved, act today as political pressure groups on public services.

EDUCAR/Baixada action

It is within this context that in 1986 EDUCAR Foundation launched the *Basic Education Project for the Baixada Fluminense Suburb*, assuming with the community

the commitment to provide the necessary financial resources and technical facilities. The agreements signed between EDUCAR and the participating institutions guarantee staff salaries as well as the acquisition of teaching material, and also include administrative expenses.

The criticism directed at MOBRAL in its last years of operation caused apprehensive reaction on the part of these institutions to the EDUCAR proposal. However, since the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had already signed a technical co-operation agreement with the Foundation, there were already grounds for credibility from some of the associations in Baixada Fluminense. This significantly influenced their final decision.

Since the project began, its methodology has been strongly committed to an increase in citizenship rights, turning education into 'a process of critical understanding of reality, hinged on a political project of social transformation'. This directive also motivates EDUCAR's technical staff, who assume a role of methodological guide in socializing knowledge, systematizing and evaluating the experience, without ever intervening directly in the local groups.

Initially, 181 classes were opened, each class enrolling twenty to twenty-five students. In 1987 this number was increased to 285 on the initiative of the institutions involved. This total was basically maintained in 1988, while in 1989 a slight increase was registered: 294.

The staff working on the project have been selected through examination, interview and through their participation in community work. The monitors are required to have completed high school education, while the supervisors must have a university degree, preferably in the field of education. Area co-ordinators are chosen by their institutions and they participate very actively in the social and political movements of their municipalities.

10

Educational proposal

The educational proposal developed by the project does not differ from that offered by the EDUCAR Foundation. It is conceived in three stages: the first corresponds to literacy; the second consolidates the first by adding systematized notions of social studies and natural sciences; while the third stage completes basic education. All of them together make up a total of nearly 1,200 class hours.

The method adopted is that of 'wording'. It should be stressed, however, that the use of this method establishes its own sequence since the generative words are derived from the adult student's life in Baixada Fluminense: *life, people, ditch, love, party, violence, rhythm, constitution*, among others. In the first phase, the generative words act as thematic guides to other areas of

O TREM	*THE TRAIN*
Hoje é o primeiro dia de trabalho de Pedro.	*Today is Peter's first day at work.*
Ele acordou alegre, disposto e foi pegar o trem.	*He woke up feeling good and went to catch the train.*
Ele viajou em pé num trem lotado durante uma hora.	*He stood for one whole hour in a crowded train.*
Pedro estava cansado, antes de começar a trabalhar.	*Peter was tired before starting work.*
CUSTO DE VIDA	*COST OF LIVING*
No mercado fica o salário.	*The market takes our salary.*
Arroz, feijão e macarrão.	*Rice, beans and noodles.*
Aí vai o salário do João.	*There goes John's salary.*
João vive de ilusão.	*John lives out an illusion.*
Inicia outro mês.	*Another month begins.*
E tudo começa outra vez.	*And everything starts all over again.*

Extracted from the 'Textbook' prepared by the Integration Centre in Taquara, Duque de Caxias, 1987.

knowledge. During this period no textbook is adopted and all the materials are assembled collectively by the student, the monitor and the supervisor. The materials are later organized into texts that are reproduced for the rest of the class.

This material is very striking because of its rich content. Students express themselves through it. They talk about their daily lives, their problems, their desires, their dreams.

In the subsequent stages, EDUCAR's teaching material is used, enriched by debates, news from the papers and real-life stories, always staying within the theoretical guidelines of the project.

Personnel training, follow-up and evaluation

Considering these three elements within their political and educational contexts, it can be seen that they are intrinsically related. This is so because they operate as a process that permanently reviews the project and accompanies the development of action in a continuous movement, encompassing aspects that, for teaching purposes, are introduced separately.

Community assemblies, 'pedagogic' councils, 'deliberative' councils and weekly meetings are special moments for the development of training, follow-up and evaluation activities, since they create opportunities for discussion and confrontations leading to decision making. The participation of organized groups in them means that a relationship between the participants exists based on common and explicit objectives.

Located in the metropolitan region of Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco, and with a population of nearly 130,000 inhabitants, the municipality of Cabo has all the characteristics of a slum: large-scale migration and a high unemployment rate leading to underage prostitution and abject poverty for a large proportion of its population.

This picture looks even worse when confronted with the 'other reality' of the municipality: an important sugar-cane producer and one of the major production centres in the sugar agro-industry.

This description confirms statements previously presented in this study: that is, the extreme polarity exhibited by the Brazilian society, made up of a small number of very rich people and the masses living in misery on the edge of subsistence. In 1980, the demographic census revealed that only 30% of Cabo residents constituted the economically active population.

The work-force in the municipality of Cabo is mainly composed of labourers (*bóias-frias*), casual workers who do heavy work like cutting sugar cane. The name *Bóia-fria* refers to workers who leave the house very early in the morning, taking with them the meal they will have at lunch time. *Bóia* in northeastern Brazil means 'food'. Having no contractual ties with their employers, they receive the minimum wage.

Aware of the problem, the local government made education a priority for the municipality's administration and, in addition, made the education of adolescents and adults an integral part of the education system and not simply an appendage to it.

It should be stressed that this approach to the education of adolescents and adults is new to the country which, as a rule, still separates formal from non-formal

EDUCAR/Cabo Action

In 1986, the Project 'Life as a school' was launched alongside other educational programmes aimed at children. It caters to an adult population made up of street cleaners, women and sugar-cane cutters living in the city of Cabo. The illiterate persons who work for the City Hall are allowed to attend classes during hours that are subtracted from their working schedule. The project has succeeded in motivating the whole population, who, stimulated by the seriousness of the proposal, participate in the municipality's project.

In the project's educational guidelines, education is considered as 'an instrument of comprehension and intervention in reality, seeking to reach the working classes. And, in this perspective, it should contribute to the eradication of illiteracy, to the increase of intellectual development among the working class, and to the construction of democratic processes in society.'

With a technical staff that is linked to Professor Paulo Freire, the project 'Life as a school' follows its own course: it adopts the ideas of the great educator, re-creating his methodology, and in this way adheres to its political and educational guidelines.

The project 'Life as a school' is designed for adults and adolescents who are backward in school in relation to their age bracket, and in due time transfers them to the regular school system.

During the first year of the project's operation, the support extended to it by the EDUCAR Foundation was fragmentary. However, in subsequent years, this support has become more evident, particularly concerning financial resources.

Educational proposal

The educational objective of the 'Life as a school' project consists of two phases: literacy, lasting six months; post-literacy, lasting for fifteen months.

All the teaching material used in both phases is created by the students, their literacy instructors and the supervisors, based on the thematic universe presented by the literacy student. The themes, which have a vital significance for them, are divided into categories that encompass the relationship student/environment. Starting from immediate experiences, the process is extended to more distant ones, revealed through such generative words as: *housing, health, work, school, cachaça* (a typical Brazilian alcoholic beverage), *city hall, church, labour union, party, Brazil, election,* among others. This content constitutes the real world of the illiterate adult in Cabo, and it is *through them and because of them* that the understanding of reality should be processed in an educational work where 'wisdom' is confronted and knowledge is socialized.

The following poem provides the political and educational scope of the project:

Beto é muito pobre.	*Bob is very poor.*
Ele sai de casa de madrugada para o corte da cana.	*He leaves the house very early to cut the sugar cane.*
Quando chega lá o cabo rouba na balança. E quando a gente reclama, ele diz: – Vem porque quer.	*When he gets there the leader cheats in the measure. And when we complain, he says: 'You come because you want to.'*
O pagamento começa às oito horas e só termina à meianoite.	*Payment starts at eight and ends at midnight*
Quando Beto chega em casa, o dinheiro é pouco e não dá para comprar nada.	*When Bob gets home the money is too little and can buy almost nothing.*

Collective text from the Group in Bairro São Francisco, Cabo, Pernambuco, 1988.

The two projects selected for this study present similarities and differences. The similar aspects are:

- *the adoption of methodological guidelines based on Paulo Freire's philosophy* which, in hibernation during the authoritarian regime, were resurrected and fortified when the country resumed its democratic progress, showing that the content of these principles withstood time and persisted in the minds and praxis of Brazilian educators;
- *the validity of the collective preparation of teaching material,* mainly for the meaning it carries: constructing and learning in a symbiosis where educational and political acts are inseparable;
- *the opportunity to disseminate knowledge generated in the experimental field.* Today, both projects are visited and studied by Brazilian and foreign educators;

The contrasting aspects:

- *the form of political commitment.* The project 'Life as a school' is taking place within the context of a municipal service to deprived sectors of the populations; while the Baixada Fluminense Project began from commitment of a community, which, by recognizing education as a state duty, engaged in the educational process as a way of making people aware of their own human rights;
- *the role of the EDUCAR Foundation.* In the project 'Life as a school' EDUCAR's support is mainly financial, since the City Hall of Cabo employs a competent technical staff to develop its work. In the Baixada Fluminense Project, apart from financial support, EDUCAR contributes technical assistance through which the socialization of knowledge takes place.

Finally, I would say that the projects entwine in growth, since both are representative of a community's com-

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Carr, E.H. *Que é história?* [What is history] 2a ed. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1982, p. 27.
2. Paiva, V. Pereira. *Educaçao popular e educação de adultos: contribuição à história da educação brasileira.* [Popular education and adult education]. São Paulo, Brazil, Ed. Loyola, 1973, p. 242.
3. Brazil. Laws, Statutes, etc. *Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil* [Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil]. Brasília, Senado Federal, 1988, p. 137.

This publication has been produced by the International Bureau of Education within the context of International Literacy Year. 1990.

The International Bureau of Education acknowledges with grateful thanks this contribution by Maria Núbia Barbosa Bonfim, professor at the Federal University of Maranhão, Brazil, to the cause of Literacy. Miss Bonfim is also a member of the Educational Board in the State of Maranhão as a participant of First and Second degrees sector. Presently she is a technical director of EDUCAR Foundation, responsible for the programme and projects in the area of youth and adult literacy, coordinating and developing different experiences in this field.

This document is available in English and French and can be freely reproduced, and translated into other languages. It would be appreciated if a copy of any publication reproducing this text in full or in part could be sent to: (1) ED/PBL, Unesco, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris, France; and (2) IBE, P.O. Box 199, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland.

Readers are reminded that the opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Unesco. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Unesco Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Published in 1990 by Unesco: International Bureau of Education,
P.O. Box 199, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland.